

Testimony in support of

**S.B. No. 2 AN ACT CONCERNING THE MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF CHILDREN**

Childrens Committee Public Hearing

February 24, 2023

My name is Bridget Koestner and I am the Policy Manager at the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. I am writing in **support** of **S.B. No. 2 AN ACT CONCERNING THE MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF CHILDREN**. We are also in **support** of **S.B. No. 1051 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SERVICES; S.B. No. 1055 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS; S.B. No. 1056 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SAFETY; H.B. No. 6716 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S HEALTH**.

The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance) is the state's coalition of nine communitybased sexual assault crisis services centers who provide 24/365 crisis interventions including hotline/text/chat services, counseling, support groups, accompaniments in hospital, police and court settings, and advocacy while navigating complex criminal justice processes. In addition, The Alliance's attorneys on our Victim Rights Center of Connecticut (VRCCT) team provide no-cost legal counsel to victims and our Post-Conviction Victim Services (PCVS) victim advocates provide victim notification and services to victims whose offenders are being supervised by the Office of Adult Probation Sex Offender Supervision Unit and the Parole Special Management Unit. For 40 years, The Alliance has provided comprehensive, victim-centered and trauma-informed services to child, adolescent and adult survivors of sexual violence across our state.

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We support incentivizing sanctuary public libraries. Books about sex education, sexual orientation, gender identity, and racial justice are often the books that are banned from libraries. Ignorance about these topics is counterproductive to the prevention of sexual violence in our communities. These books are often extremely helpful resources for families navigating conversations about topics that they may find difficult to discuss. Families deserve easy, public, and free access to these resources.

Individualized family service plans and early intervention services in Spanish will help increase referrals and access to services for families. These services can help to develop protective factors, which are supports that lessen the chance of victimization. Language should not be a barrier to parents being able to understand their child's needs, gain critical community services, and potentially prevent harm.

The provision of mental health wellness days will enable victims of sexual violence to take time to prioritize their healing. We understand the significant, long term impact sexual assault has on a victim both physically and psychologically, and this time off could support their health.

New avenues to connect children to the HUSKY health program can help children who experience sexual abuse. Child victims of sexual abuse have physical and mental health needs that affordable healthcare could help to address. This would also ensure that children would have more equitable access to healthcare. As a coalition of community based non-profit organizations, we would be interested in collaborating with DSS employees to help identify and enroll eligible children as described in Section 16.

We support a grant-funded program that would support teenagers. Based on what the bill describes, these teenagers may have experienced sexual trauma and/or be at a higher risk of experiencing sexual trauma in the future. Access to services can mitigate potential long term mental and physical health challenges

We suggest the inclusion of "a non-offending parent/guardian of a minor victim" in the section beginning on line 407, as someone who could be eligible for time off. We know that when children experience sexual assault and family violence, a non-offending parent needs time off to care for their child. Parents of minor victims often need to bring their child to various appointments, relocate their family, and attend legal proceedings on their child's behalf. This inclusion would help to support families based on the way we see them experience the fallout of child sexual abuse in our communities.

S.B. No. 1051 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SERVICES; S.B. No. 1055 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS; S.B. No. 1056 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SAFETY; H.B. No. 6716 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S HEALTH

We support the proposed studies of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). We should always ensure that policies and practices impacting children are the most effective that they can be. They can impact outcomes for youth significantly, and these children are often particularly vulnerable due to their circumstances. We also recognize that effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent economic hardships have impacted and changed the needs of many children and families in the last few years. Policies and practices may need to be updated accordingly.

Thank you for your support of children and families in our communities. Please feel free to reach out with questions any time.

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